

A PASTORAL VISIT NO. 3103

A SERMON
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*“The church in thy house.”
Philemon 1:2*

SOME interpreters have supposed that a small congregation met for worship in a room in Philemon’s house, and there is a tradition that such was the case for some considerable time. The churches established by Paul were, at their commencement, for the most part small. Obligated—for peace’ sake, and to avoid persecution—to meet in out of-the-way places, where they were not likely to be seen by foes, the retired house of some well-known friend, perhaps that of the minister, if it had a room conveniently large, would be the natural place for believers to gather together in those early churches.

Philemon, therefore, might literally have had a church in his house, and a congregation might have gathered there. It strikes me that there would be a great deal of good done if persons who have large rooms in their houses would endeavor to get together little congregations, there are many, even of our poorer friends, who live in neighborhoods of London destitute of the means of grace, who might promote a great blessing if they occasionally opened their houses for a prayer meeting or religious assembly. We need no consecrated places for the worship of God.

*“Where’er we seek Him He is found,
And every place is hallowed ground.”*

Certainly our text does not give any countenance to the calling of certain buildings “churches.” Buildings for worship, whether erected by Episcopalians or Dissenters, are frequently called “churches.” If I ask for “the church” in any town, I am forthwith directed to an edifice, probably with a spire or a steeple, which the inhabitants call “the church.” Why, they might as well point me to a signpost when I asked for a man, a building cannot be a church.

A church is an assembly of faithful men, and it cannot be anything else. I cannot see how such a piece of architecture as we now call “a church” could very well have been in Philemon’s house, it must have been a large house if it had such a thing in it for an ornament. The fact is, it is a misnomer, a misuse of language, and we must mind that we do not get into it.

For my own part, I like the good old-fashioned name of “meeting house” as well as any. It is a place where the people of God meet, and although “meeting house” does not sound very smart, nor fine, nor fashionable—and that is everything, nowadays, with many people—yet it is far better than misusing language, as it is misused when bricks, and stones, and mortar receive a tittle belonging exclusively to godly men and women.

However, it appears that Philemon had a church in his house—a church largely, if not exclusively, composed of his own family, that he was privileged to possess a godly wife—the beloved Apphia, that their sons and daughters walked in their parents’ footsteps, and that their servants, and even their visitor, Archippus, were members of this church which was in the house of Philemon.

I. Now let me attempt to describe A CHURCH IN A HOUSE, meaning all the while, to be asking you WHETHER YOU HAVE A CHURCH IN YOUR HOUSE.

A church, according to the New Testament, consists of converted persons, or persons who profess to be converted. No visible church is absolutely pure, a church must be taken upon its own profession,

consisting as it does of persons who avow themselves to be followers of and believers in Christ, having been converted from darkness to light by the Spirit of God. Well, then, I see, in a family where there is a church, a godly father and a godly mother rejoicing over converted sons and daughters, and glad and able to entrust their household affairs to Christian servants.

It cannot be a church, whatever profession may be made, unless there is the grace of God there, it may be nominally such, but it cannot be really so. A family is not born a church, and the little ones born into the family are not born into the church. They must be born again before they can be members of the church, there must have been the work of the Spirit of God in the hearts of the members of the family before they can form a church in the house.

But it strikes me that a number of converted people are not necessarily a church, but in order to form a church, *they must worship together*. Happy is the household which meets every morning for prayer! Happy are they who let not the evening depart without uniting in supplication! Brethren, I wish it were more common, I wish it were universal, with all professors of religion to have family prayer.

We sometimes hear of the children of Christian parents who do not grow up in the fear of God, and we are asked how it is that they turn out so badly. In many, very many cases, I fear there is such a neglect of family worship that it is not probable that the children are at all impressed by any piety supposed to be possessed by their parents.

Family prayer in our old Puritan households was a matter of very great importance. Let me tell you what Philip Henry used to do. He was a minister, and of course had more time to give to it than many of you in business have, but he went through the whole Bible in course, expounding it chapter by chapter, and accompanying it by prayer and singing. One reason he gave for singing was that it was like Rahab's tying the crimson line in the window—everyone who went by would know what she had done, and he said that the sound of singing at family prayers, was a distinct confession that that family loved and worshipped God.

He called his children together on Thursdays and catechized them upon the General Assembly's Catechism and upon the lessons through which they had gone during the week. Perhaps you will think that this was very dreary work, but what will you say when I tell you that that good man's son, Mr. Matthew Henry, wrote his famous Commentary from the notes which he took of his father's expositions at morning and evening prayers?

Young lads do not take notes of dreary things, you may depend upon it, catch them at that, if you can. We do not find our boys taking down heavy sermons, but they have no objection to putting down anything which strikes and interests them. That family of Mr. Henry, to which I have referred, was so well ordered that very often visitors to the house, who were unconverted when they went there, were converted during their visit.

Now I do not suppose that you could, all of you, expound the Scriptures like that, and you could not all, perhaps, sing, but I do think we might all of us manage to come together once a day at least—twice, if possible—for the worship of God in the household. Remember what Matthew Henry says—"They who pray in the family, do well, they who read and pray, do better, but they who sing, and read, and pray, do best of all."

If we want to bring up a godly family, who shall be a seed to serve God when our heads are under the clods of the valley, let us seek to train them up in the fear of God by meeting together as a family for worship. I do not see how there can be a church without worship, and I do not see how there can be a church in a house unless there is constant worship in the family.

But there must be something more than this before there can be a church. A church is not merely a company of people meeting for worship, *there must be some bond of unity*. A load of bricks is not a house, the bricks must be fitly framed and cemented together, and then they grow into a house. So a church is fitly framed together, and grows into a holy temple for the Lord.

Now, dear friends, there must be a knitting of hearts among Christians in families. Of course, they will love each other from the ties of the flesh, but they should also love each other from the higher ties

of the Spirit. There is no reason why, without breaking through any of the gradations that must necessarily exist in society, there should not be a bond of unity taking in the whole family—master, mistress, children, and servants. In the olden times, in the days of such men as Abraham, the servants were a part of the family. Nowadays, people change their servants once a month, and there are some servants who stop too long even then, but it strikes me that good masters and good mistresses make good servants, and where love and kindness are shown, it will not always, nor often, be the case that the servants will be a social evil. Instead of that, they will be a great benefit, and a wise, prudent, Christian servant becomes as much a part of the household as even a child.

To make a church, there must be a feeling of union. I should like to see the clan-feeling in our families, in which every servant would stand up for the master's honor, and everyone would seek the good of the entire family, and even when the children were grown up and scattered, it would be well to see them still duly respecting the ties of Christian kindred, and seeking to promote the good and the unity of the whole.

And to make a church, *there must be oversight*. A church is not a complete church without a pastor, its elders, and its deacons. A church in the house will have its elders. There need not be any election of these because they are elected already. The parents will naturally take the oversight of the little church that is in the house.

If you want a pastor, the father should be the priest in his own house, he is the most fitting teacher, expounder, and example. Then who are to be your deacons? Why, those who have to go out to the factory, when the bell rings in the morning, and who help to provide food for the household, and there is another we must not forget—that gentle one who goes so noiselessly about the house to see after her husband and children, and who produces a thousand happy thoughts by that kind way of hers.

Sometimes the oversight of the household will fall to the lot of the eldest son, or daughter, but sometimes some long-abiding servant, some old housekeeper, becomes virtually the presiding genius. There must be oversight, and God sometimes graciously sends to families those who are more advanced in spiritual things, who become, as it were, the officers of the church in the house.

A church in the house must of course, *be furnished with instruction*. One of the first reasons why there is a church at all is to teach the members. We are formed into churches for mutual edification. Ah, dear friends! how much youthful piety receives edification in those households where the parents set a godly example! Wonderful is the influence of the mother upon her son.

You recollect the case of the mighty Byron, who seems to have been a sort of fallen angel, who flew across the sky like a thunderbolt from a Satanic hand. What was his mother? Why, a very passionate woman, who frequently threw the tongs at her own son in her passion, of course she had a wild and passionate son.

Look, on the other hand, at the meek and gentle bard of Olney, pouring forth notes that were almost fit for heaven. What sort of mother had Cowper? You know her character well, as her son has described it in the lines beginning—

“Oh, that those lips had language!”

Let Christian parents, forming a church in their house, look to the formation of the character of their children, especially their converted children, and let them not overlook their converted servants. With an ardent and a longing desire, strive to build them up in the faith, and help them to grow in grace, and in the knowledge of the Lord. You Christian fathers ought to take care, as far as your means allow, to provide your children with instructive books, I do not mean dull books, but good, interesting books, at once instructive and attractive, that may teach them the way of God more perfectly.

Whenever you have the opportunity, let drop a word which will strike the child's attention, and remain in its heart. Just as I, as a preacher, would never miss an opportunity of saying anything here which I met with in the week, and which I thought you ought to hear, so let the Christian father be studying each day how he may instruct the church in his house in the fear of the Lord more perfectly.

I think I have now described the church so far as its organization is concerned, but I cannot very well describe it all. You must go and live in the midst of such a church to understand thoroughly what it is like. Mr. Talkative, in “The Pilgrim’s Progress,” was a very fine fellow abroad, and had a great deal to say about religion, but what was he at home? Ah! nothing could be said of him there worth the hearing.

Where there is a church in the house, every member strives to increase the other’s comfort, all seek to promote each other’s holiness, each one endeavors to discharge his duty according to the position in which he is placed in that church, and when they meet together, their prayers are earnest and fervent, and all their actions are not the actions of a worldly family, but of those who have tasted that the Lord is gracious.

One thing more. *A church is really worth nothing at all if it does not try to extend itself*, and a church in a house is no true church if it be satisfied without endeavoring to bring in every member of the family. If you have half a dozen converted, but there are seven of you, never leave off praying till you have the seventh, and if, in God’s mercy, He has given you ten out of eleven, there are ten reasons why you should be in earnest for the conversion of the eleventh. Plead with the Master till your little church shall have swallowed up the whole of your congregation.

A happy day will it be for us when the church in the Tabernacle fills every pew, but you may come at your results sooner than we can come at ours, may the day soon come when the church in your house shall include every person in the family, not one being left out! What a happy world it would be if there were such a church in every house! It would be heaven begun below! The angels might then mistake earth for heaven, and linger so long that they would need to be recalled to paradise, making the mistake that they were in paradise already.

Oh! may we live to see the day when, walking down a street in London, we shall hear at the appointed hour in every house, the song of praise, and know that no door will be locked for the night till first the Lord has been asked to keep watch and ward over the slumbering household.

II. Having thus described a church in a house, I propose what I cannot often accomplish among you, though I wish I could, and that is, TO PAY YOU A PASTORAL VISIT.

I am going to knock at your door, take a chair and sit down, and ask you a few simple questions. The first is, *Have you a church in your house?* “No,” says one, “I am the only converted one in the house.” Ah, dear friend! I can understand the difficulty of your position, but I can also rejoice in the hopefulness of your being there, trusting that it is a token for good to the house. Now that the Lord has sent one spark of fire there, may there soon be a flame!

“Well,” says another, “we have several Christians in our house, but I cannot say that there is a church here.” I like your honesty, my friend, but may I tell you what I suspect is the reason why there are so many houses that have Christians in them, but no churches? It often is because those Christians are inconsistent. Why, if some of you were not professors of religion, you would be very decent sort of people, but being professors, the way in which you act and speak is detestable.

You may think this strong language, but I know it is true. There are some families where the father, instead of exhibiting the gentleness and kindness of a Christian, well-nigh scares the children from the very thought of godliness. There are some households where the wife is a gadding busybody, whose slovenliness and dirt might well disgust her husband at the very thought of going to the house of prayer. There are some children professing godliness, who have not yet learned the commandment which tells them to obey their parents, and there are some professedly Christian servants who are eye-servers, not remembering what Paul has said to such.

One of the worst evils we have to deal with, as Christians, is the evil of inconsistency at home. Whenever I see a professed Christian walking among his household as though he were a tyrant, letting no one come near him, without affection or kindness, and simply a domineering master, I ask—Where is the grace of God in that man? and I ask the same question with respect to other faults. O beloved, do make your households happy! You cannot make them holy if you do not shine with genial cheerfulness.

And you Christian people in households, do seek to act so that you may not be a disgrace to your profession, but may form a true church in the house where you dwell together.

While I thus speak, perhaps you will say that I am exposing too much of that domestic economy over which you judge it convenient to drop a veil. It is my duty to tell you the truth plainly, so listen to it attentively. “Well,” someone says, “I thank God that I have a church in my house.” Then I thank God too, and we will together praise and bless Him for His great mercy, but I must now ask you, *Who are the members?* “Well, there is Father.” Oh, I am so glad, because your father has so much to do with the management, and if he who holds the reins cannot drive, there will be some mistake. I am glad father is converted.

“Ah!” says one, “but my father is not converted.” Then, I am sorry. O Father, I beseech you, let your child’s prayer come into your ear, as well as into God’s ear! You will be a curse to your family if you are not a blessing, and I know you do not want to be a bane to your offspring. But with some of you the father is converted and the mother is converted too. I am glad of that, because parents, and mothers in particular, have a sweet influence on the family and the little ones.

Well, then, let us see, is John converted? Is the eldest son yet made a partaker of divine grace? “Yes.” Oh, then that is a mercy, because elder brothers have so much to do, by their example, in inclining younger brothers rightly or wrongly. And Emily—is she converted? That is a happy thing, if it be so, for she also will have a great influence for good upon the younger ones.

Now where does it stop? I hope it does not stop at the servants, are they converted? Happy is the master who has Christian servants, and I speak experientially when I say this. It is a great comfort to you to have those about you who really do fear God.

Yes, but we must not forget any who are in the household. I must ask you, *Who are they who are not converted?* The very little ones of course are too young to understand, so we will leave them in the hands of a covenant God, and plead with Him for them. But are there not some who can understand, but who are not yet converted?

“Ah!” says the mother, “do not ask me about that,” and she brushes away a tear, and the father says, “It is a painful subject.” Yes, it is a painful subject, but we must mention it, because some of them are here tonight. You would not willfully give your parents pain, young man, would you? I know your desire is to comfort them, and there can be no greater joy to them than to know that their children are walking in the truth.

And among the servants, there is the nursemaid, is she brought in? And there is the kitchen-boy, do not leave him out. A church in a house is not complete till it comprises everybody in the house, from the scullion up to the master. Ay, and if there is a friend staying there, the church is not complete till the friend is also converted. Now, I cannot expect you all to answer me, but I still hope that you will do it quietly to yourselves. How many members are there in the church in your house? Who are members, and who are not?

Then, by your leave, I shall ask you another question, and that is, *As you have a church consisting of so many members, what are you doing for Christ?* It is no use having a church that is not doing anything. As a family, are you seeking to extend the bounds of Messiah’s kingdom within your own sphere? Dr. Guthrie advocates Territorial Missions, and a very admirable scheme it is to advocate, and I give him all honor for it, but I will tonight take the liberty of advocating Home Missions.

I do not mean missions that have to do with anything outside, but missions to the kitchen, the parlor, the drawing-room and every room up to the garret—missions in which every single one in the family shall be concerned. I hope that, as a church in the house, you will not have a neglected district in the house.

Some of you go out tract-distributing, begin at home. Some of you preach, begin to preach at home. Hard work that, because those to whom you preach know how you practice, but if you cannot preach at home because your practice runs counter to your preaching, do not preach at all, for a man has no right to talk and instruct others if he cannot, at least in some measure, live out what he teaches.

III. Before leaving, however, I venture to GIVE A LITTLE ADVICE AS TO THE WAY OF HAVING A CHURCH IN A HOUSE.

It must be brought about, of course, by divine grace. The Holy Spirit is the great Agent, but still He uses means. You young woman—yes, you—you are thinking about being engaged to that young man. You are a professed Christian, but he is a worldling. Now, do you ever expect to have a church in your house at that rate? And may I ask you—do you know what you are at? I see some of you are smiling, well, you may smile as much as you can now, for you will never have much smiling after, I can tell you. If you want to wither your happiness forever, you have only to go and be yoked with an unbeliever.

I have known some Christian women who have forgotten the divine precept, and have been married to ungodly men, and I have seen godly men married to ungodly women, and mark this—my experience has not been very long, but it has been very wide—I *never knew any good come of it*. I have always seen misery as the result, and in nine cases out of ten backsliding has followed—often final, too—proving that the person committing that sin had no grace at all.

We do not often talk about these things when we are preaching, but we ought to talk about them a great deal more than we do. I do beseech you, Christian young people, if you hope to have God's blessing, take care that you do not get "unequally yoked with unbelievers."

Then, supposing the house is already started, I have this advice to give. *If you want to bring in others of the family who are not converted, make them happy.* There are a great many more flies caught with honey than with vinegar, and there are a great many more persons brought to God by love than there are by pitiless declamations. "The love of Christ constraineth," not only after we are saved, but it is often the constraining means of bringing us to be saved. Let us imitate Puritan theology in its soundness, and Puritanic living in its holiness, but not in its gloom—if, indeed, it was gloomy, which I very much question.

Let the Christian family be the most cheerful household anywhere, and if I might venture on the advice, let me say, *never make Sunday doleful and sad*. Some people do. Why, I think Sunday should be to the household the bright day of the week—the day when father is at home—the day when the mother is not at work—the day when John comes home to spend a few hours—the day when they all go to the house of God and sing—

*"I have been there, and still would go,
'Tis like a little heaven below."*

Oh! do make your households to be like flower gardens, plant no thorns, and root out all ill weeds of discontent. Depend upon it, household happiness is a great means of promoting household holiness.

And let me entreat you, dear friends, to *be much in prayer for those who are not converted*. "Yes," says the mother, "my unconverted boy is gone away from home." Well, but your prayers can follow him. See the case of Philemon and Onesimus [See sermon #1268, The Story of a Runaway Slave]. Onesimus had run away with some of his master's money, but his master sent his prayers after him, and by and by there came a sheriff's officer to arrest him—not one of Caesar's officers, but one of God's. It was the apostle Paul who, in the preaching of the Word, arrested the runaway servant, and he went back to his master saved.

How do you know but that your son will come home converted? How do you know, mother, but what you will yet see your daughter rejoicing in Christ? Never cease praying for them till the breath is out of their bodies, but continue in supplication till they are brought into the church in your house.

But O you Christians, who wish to make a church in your house, *do not let your own inconsistencies mar any good work in others*, above all, *do not have any disagreements among yourselves*. Talk not in such a way that good impressions, once happily made, become wretchedly marred.

I have heard of a wife walking home with her husband from a place of worship. He was an ungodly man, she had often prayed for him, and he went with her to hear the sermon. She had been praying that he might be blessed, and yet in walking home she was foolish enough to begin criticizing the sermon.

She asked him how he liked it, and he made no answer. She began pulling it to pieces, till at last he stopped her and said, “My dear wife, you have often prayed to God that I might be blessed, God has blessed that sermon to me this morning, and I cannot bear to hear you speak of it as you have been speaking.”

I know this is a fault with many Christians—not that we ministers care at all what you say about us, except for the evil you often do in spoiling to others that which does not happen to suit your fastidious taste, for you may in that way be doing the devil’s work.

IV. The last thing I want you to say is this. LOOK ONWARDS A MINUTE.

When Halyburton lay a-dying, he said, among other joyous expressions, “I bless God that I have a father in heaven, I bless God that I have a mother in heaven, I bless God that I have ten brothers and sisters in heaven, I am the last of the family, and I shall be in heaven within an hour!” This was a glorious thought! What a happy meeting theirs would be! Spirits “are neither married nor given in marriage,” nor are social ties respected there, still, I cannot conceive of Halyburton’s family but as making up a constellation like the Pleiades, all meekly and gently shining together to the praise of God.

I saw in a house the other day, a very singular picture of the resurrection. It was supposed to represent the resurrection of a Christian family. The artist was not very imaginative, but still he had done it pretty well.

The big stone that covered the tomb was just broken in halves, and you saw coming up at the top some of the little ones, those latest buried, there were three or four of them stretching their wings upwards. Of course, this represented as much the resurrection of the soul as of the body in the artist’s mind, it was rather a complicated metaphor. Then there were the father, and mother, and a number of grandchildren, and I was glad to see that there were the grandsire and grandmother both coming up from one tomb, and going up together to the throne of God. I only hope that, though some of us may be buried in distant lands and—

*“Our graves be scattered far and wide,
By fount, and stream, and sea,”—*

yet, practically, we may rise together, when the last trumpet sounds, an unbroken family.

I may be excused, perhaps, for referring to God’s singular mercy to my own household. What a blessing it is to my father and mother now that they can rejoice in six of their children walking in the truth, who have given themselves up to the Lord Jesus! The Lord has been graciously pleased to bring them in one by one, and all who have now reached years of discretion, so as to be able to understand the Gospel, have believed in Jesus Christ, and in generations that have gone by, my grandsire could say the same, and *his* sire could say the same of his house.

We have been a race of those whom God has blessed. May it be your privilege, also, beloved members of this church! I cannot wish you a greater blessing. If I knew how to bestow the greatest blessing upon you, I think my knowledge would not amount to more than this, that, being yourselves saved, you might have all your families walking in the truth, and speaking after the manner of men, why should it not be the case with you? Prayer, earnest and mighty prayer, gets no denial from the throne of God.

“Faith, mighty faith, the promise sees,”

and claims its fulfillment, “for the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even to as many as the Lord our God shall call.” God’s eternal purpose stands fast and fixed, we know, but when He moves His people’s hearts to pray, He intends to bless. We will be more earnest in praying for one another than we have been, we will be more earnest in praying about our children than we have been, and may God grant us grace so that we may all of us be able to say that we have a church in our house! “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ,” this is the foundation of the church, and they who have believed are members of Christ’s church, and so see His face in the midst of the one family in heaven

and earth, which is named by Him as “the general assembly and church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven.” God grant that, of this church, both we and ours may all be members!

EXPOSITION BY C. H. SPURGEON

PHILEMON

Verse 1. *Paul, a prisoner of Jesus Christ,—*

This is one of Paul’s private letters, though it has the stamp of inspiration upon it. It was not written concerning church business, nor to teach some great doctrinal truth, but there was a runaway slave, who had come to Rome and who had been converted under Paul’s ministry, and Paul was sending him back to his master, and this was the letter which he was to take with him, to make some sort of apology for him, and to ask his master to receive him with kindness, and to forgive his fault.

Every word of this epistle is very wisely put. Paul begins by calling himself “a prisoner of Jesus Christ.” Who would not grant him his desire when he was wearing a chain for Christ’s sake? If a letter were to come to you from some beloved minister, whom you knew to be lying in a dungeon, and likely soon to die, you would be greatly touched if you noticed the traces of the rust of his fetters on the letter. “Paul, a prisoner of Jesus Christ,”—

1-2. And Timothy our brother, unto Philemon our dearly beloved, and fellowlabourer, and to our beloved Apphia, and Archippus our fellowsoldier, and to the church in thy house:

He joins Timothy with himself, to give double weight to the message. Probably Timothy was well known to Philemon, and much respected by him, so he puts Timothy’s name that there might be two to plead with him. Then, notice the loving titles with which Paul addresses Philemon, “our dearly beloved, and fellowlabourer.” Probably the person whom Paul called, “beloved Apphia” was Philemon’s wife, so he writes to her also, for perhaps the wife was the more tender-hearted of the two, so she might put in a good word for Onesimus, and her husband would all the more readily grant Paul’s request.

He also mentions Archippus, who was either the pastor of the church at Colosse, or an evangelist who stayed occasionally at the house of Philemon. So he mentions him with all the rest of the household who met there for worship, and so made up the church in the house.

3-7. Grace to you, and peace, from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. I thank my God, making mention of thee always in my prayers, hearing of thy love and faith, which thou hast toward the Lord Jesus, and toward all saints; that the communication of thy faith may become effectual by the acknowledging of every good thing which is in you in Christ Jesus. For we have great joy and consolation in thy love, because the bowels of the saints are refreshed by thee, brother.

Paul recalls how much Philemon had done in the comforting of persecuted and poor saints. And when you are about to ask a favor of anyone, it is well to show your gratitude for what you or others have already received from him.

8-9. Wherefore, though I might be much bold in Christ to enjoin thee that which is convenient, yet for love’s sake I rather beseech thee, being such an one as Paul the aged, and now also a prisoner of Jesus Christ.

He says in effect, “I am an apostle, and I am your spiritual father, so I might have spoken with authority to you, and have said, ‘It is your duty to do this,’ but I am not going to do anything of the kind. I am going to plead with you, and beseech it of you as a kindness and a favor. Pay a loving tribute to my old age, and besides that, I am a prisoner, shut up in the dungeon for Christ’s sake, hear the clanking of my chains, and grant my request ‘for love’s sake.’”

10. I beseech thee for my son Onesimus, whom I have begotten in my bonds:

“He came to hear me preach in the prison. He has been listening to me while I am still a captive, and he has been given to me, as another son in the Gospel, to be a comfort to me in my bonds. I beseech you for him.”

11-12. *Which in time past was to thee unprofitable, but now profitable to thee and to me: whom I have sent again:*

“He was thy slave, and therefore I have sent him back to thee.”

12. *Thou therefore receive him, that is, mine own bowels:*

“Look upon him as though he were my very heart, and receive him as you would receive me if I could go to you.”

13-14. *Whom I would have retained with me, that in thy stead he might have ministered unto me in the bonds of the Gospel: but without thy mind would I do nothing; that thy benefit should not be as it were of necessity, but willingly.*

“I would have kept him,” says Paul, “for I need someone to be my companion, to comfort me in my distress, but I would not do it without asking your leave, lest I should seem to take advantage of you. Though I know that you would willingly consent to it, yet, nevertheless, that it might be perfectly voluntary on your part, I have sent him back to you, that you may do as you will with him.”

15-17. *For perhaps he therefore departed for a season, that thou shouldest receive him for ever; not now as a servant, but above a servant, a brother beloved, specially to me, but how much more unto thee, both in the flesh, and in the Lord? If thou count me therefore a partner,—*

“If thou hast true fellowship and communion with me,”—

17. *Receive him as myself.*

How beautifully this is put all through! It very much reminds me of our Lord Jesus Christ, who seems to say to the Divine Father, “This poor child is in fellowship with Me. Receive him, therefore, as Myself,” and this is just what God does in the case of repenting and believing sinners, He receives them just as if He could see Christ in them.

18. *If he hath wronged thee, or oweth thee ought, put that on mine account;*

How generously this is put by this poor prisoner at Rome, and how gloriously, in this, he is like our Master, who stands as Surety for us!

19. *I Paul have written it with mine own hand, I will repay it: albeit I do not say to thee how thou owest unto me even thine own self besides.*

Paul had been the means of Philemon’s conversion, so he was immeasurably in debt to the apostle, but Paul only gently reminds him of the fact as a reason why he should deal kindly with Onesimus for his sake.

20. *Yea, brother, let me have joy of thee in the Lord: refresh my bowels in the Lord.*

“You have refreshed others, then, surely, you will not let me be without refreshment now. You have been very kind to all sorts of saints, then you cannot be unkind to the man who is your own spiritual father.”

21. *Having confidence in thy obedience I wrote unto thee, knowing that thou wilt also do more than I say.*

This is delicately yet forcibly put, and we feel certain that Philemon must have done as Paul wished, even though we have no record of the fact.

22-25. *But withal prepare me also a lodging: for I trust that through your prayers I shall be given unto you. There salute thee Epaphras, my fellowprisoner in Christ Jesus; Marcus, Aristarchus, Demas, Lucas, my fellowlabourers. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen.*

Taken from The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit C. H. Spurgeon Collection. Only necessary changes have been made, such as correcting spelling errors, some punctuation usage, capitalization of deity pronouns, and minimal updating of a few archaic words. The content is unabridged. Additional Bible-based resources are available at www.spurgeongems.org.